

"OUT OF THUN."

BY ROBERT BARR,

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I.

BESSIE'S BEHAVIOR.



ON one point Miss Bessie Durand agreed with Alexander von Humboldt; in fact she even went farther than that celebrated man, for while he asserted that Thun was one of the three most beautiful spots on earth, Bessie held that this Swiss town was absolutely the most perfectly lovely place she had ever visited. Her reason for this conclusion differed from that of Humboldt. The latter, being a mere man, had been influenced by the situation of the town, the rapid foaming river, the placid green lake, the high mountains all around and the snow peaks to the east, the ancient castle overlooking everything, and the quaint streets with the pavements up at the first floors.

Bessie had an eye for all these things, of course, but while waterfalls and profound ravines were all very well in their way, her hotel had to be filled with the right sort of company before any spot on earth was entirely satisfactory to Bessie. She did not care to be out of humanity's reach, nor to take her small journeys alone; she liked to hear the sweet music of speech, and if she started at the sound of her own, Bessie would have been on the jump all day, for she was a brilliant and effusive talker.

So it happened that in touring through Switzerland, Bessie and her mother (somehow people always placed Bessie's name before that of her mother, who was a quiet little unobtrusive woman) stopped at Thun intending to stay but a day, as

most people do, but when Bessie found the big hotel simply swarming with nice young men, she told her mother that the local guide book asserted that Humboldt had once said Thun was one of the three most lovely places on earth and therefore they ought to stay there and enjoy its beauties, which they at once proceeded to do.

The young men at the big hotel in Thun were clad mostly in knickerbockers, and many of them had alpenstocks of their own. It soon became their delight to sit on the terrace in front of the hotel during the pleasant summer evenings and relate to Bessie their hair-breadth escapes, the continuous murmur of the river Aare forming a soothing chorus to their dramatic narrations. At least a dozen young men hovered around the girl, willing and eager to confide in her; but while Bessie was smiling and kind to them all, it was soon evident that some special one was her favorite, and then the rest hung hopelessly back. Things would go wonderfully well for this lucky fellow for a day or two, and he usually became so offensively conceited in his bearing towards the rest, that the wonder is he escaped without personal vengeance being wreaked upon him. Then all at once he would pack up his belongings, and gloomily depart for Berne or Interlaken, depending on whether his ultimate destination was west or east.

It came to be currently reported in the hotel that Bessie had refused no less than seven of the young men who had been staying there, and as these young men had one after another packed up and departed either by the last train at night or the earliest in the morning, the proprietor began to wonder what the matter was, especially as each of the departing guests had but a short time before expressed renewed delight with the hotel and its surroundings. Several of them had stated to the proprietor that they had abandoned their intention of proceeding further with their Swiss tour, so satisfied were they with Thun and all its belongings.

Among the guests there was one young fellow who was quite as much perplexed as the proprietor. Archie Severance was one

of the last to fall under the spell of Bessie, if indeed it is correct to speak of Archie falling at all. He was a very deliberate young man, not given to doing anything precipitously, but there is no doubt that the charming personality of Bessie fascinated him, although he seemed to content himself with admiring her at a distance. Bessie somehow did not seem to care about being admired from a distance, and once when Archie was promenading back and forth on the terrace above the river, she smiled sweetly at him from her book and he sat down beside her. Jimmy Wellman had gone that morning, and the rest had not yet found it out. Jimmy had so completely monopolized Miss Durand for the last few days that no one else had had a chance, but now that he had departed, Bessie sat alone on the terrace, which was a most unusual state of things.

"They tell me," said Bessie in her most clattering manner, "that you are a famous climber and that you have been to the top of the Matterhorn."

"Oh, not famous; far from it," said Archie modestly. "I have been up the Matterhorn three or four times, but then women and children make that ascent nowadays, so that is nothing unusual."

"I am sure you must have had some thrilling escapes," continued Bessie, looking with admiration at Archie's stalwart frame. "Mr. Wellman had an awful experience."

"Yesterday?" interrupted Archie. "I hear he left early this morning."

"No, not yesterday," said Miss Durand coldly, drawing herself up with some indignation; but as she glanced sideways at Mr. Severance, that young man seemed so innocent that she thought perhaps he meant nothing in particular by his remark. So after a slight pause Bessie went on again. "It was a week ago. He was climbing the Stockhorn, and all at once the clouds surrounded him."

"And what did Jimmy do? Waited till the clouds rolled by, I suppose."

"Now, Mr. Severance, if you are going to laugh at me, I shall not talk to you any more."

"I assure you, Miss Durand, I was not laughing at you. I was laughing at Jimmy. I never regarded the Stockhorn as a formidable peak. It is something like seven thousand and ninety-five feet high, I believe, not to mention the inches."

"But surely, Mr. Severance, you know very well that the danger of a mountain does not necessarily bear any proportion to its altitude above the sea."

"That is very true. I am sure that Jimmy himself, with his head in the clouds, has braved greater dangers at much lower levels than the top of the Stockhorn."

Again Miss Durand looked searchingly at the young man beside



"SOME SPECIAL ONE WAS HER FAVORITE, AND THEN THE REST HUNG HOPELESSLY BACK."

her, but again Archie was gazing dreamily at the curious bell-shaped summit of the mountain under discussion. The Stockhorn stands out nobly head and shoulders above its fellows, when viewed from the hotel terrace at Thun. There was silence for a few moments between the two, and Bessie said to herself that she did not at all like this exceedingly self-possessed young man who seemed to look at the mountains in preference to gazing at her; which was against the natural order of things. It was evident that Mr. Severance needed to be taught a lesson, and Bessie, who had a good deal of justifiable confidence in her own powers as a teacher, resolved to give him the necessary instruction.

"I do so love to hear of narrow escapes," said Bessie confidently. "I think it is so inspiring to hear of human courage and endurance being pitted against the dangers of the Alps and coming out victorious."

"Yes, they usually come out victorious according to the accounts that reach us, but then you know we never hear the mountain's side of the story."

"But surely, Mr. Severance," appealed Bessie, "you do not imagine that a real climber would exaggerate when telling of what he had done?"

"No. Oh no. I would not go so far as to say that he would exaggerate exactly, but I have known cases where . . . well . . . a sort of alpine glow came over a story, that, I must confess, improved it very much. Then again, curious mental transformations take place which have the effect of making a man what the vulgar term a liar. Some years ago a friend of mine came over here to do a few ascents, but he found sitting on the hotel piazza so much more to his taste that he sat there. I think myself that the veranda climber is the most sensible man of the lot of us, and if he has a good imagination there is no reason why he should be distanced by those you call real climbers when it comes to telling stories of adventures. Well, this man, who is a most truthful person, took one false step. You know some amateurs have a vile habit of getting the names of various peaks branded on their alpenstocks, just as if any real climber ever used an alpenstock."

"Why, what do they use?" asked Bessie, much interested.

"Ice-axes, of course. Now there is a useful individual in Interlaken who is what you might call a wholesale brander. He has the names of all the peaks done in

iron at his shop, and if you take your alpenstock to him, he will, for a few francs, brand on it all the names it will hold, from the Ortler to Mount Blanc. My friend was weak enough to have all the climbs he intended to make branded on the alpenstock he bought the moment he entered Switzerland. They always buy an alpenstock the first thing. He never had the time to return to the mountains, but gradually he came to believe that he had made all the ascents recorded by fire and iron on his pole. He is a truthful man on every other topic than Switzerland."

"But you must have had some very dangerous experiences among the Alps, Mr. Severance. Please tell me of the time you were in the greatest peril."

"I am sure it would not interest you."

"Oh, it would, it would. Please go on, and don't require so much persuasion. I am just longing to hear the story."

"It isn't much of a story, because, you see, there is no alpine glow about it."

Archie glanced at the girl, and it flashed across his mind that he was probably then in the greatest danger he had ever been in, in his life. She bent forward toward him, her elbows on her knees, and her chin—such a pretty chin—in her hands. Her eyes were full upon him, and Archie had sense enough to realize that there was danger in their clear, pellucid depths; so he, too, turned his own from them and sought refuge in his old friend the Stockhorn.

"I think the narrowest escape I ever had was about two weeks ago. I went up . . ."

"With how many guides?" interrupted Bessie breathlessly.

"With none at all," answered Archie with a laugh.

"Isn't that very unsafe? I thought one always should have a guide."

"Sometimes guides are unnecessary. I took none on this occasion because I only ascended as far as the Chateau in Thun, some three hundred feet above where we are sitting, and as I went by the main street of the town, the climb was perfectly safe in all weathers. Besides there is generally a policeman about."

"Oh," said the girl, sitting up suddenly very straight. Archie was looking at the mountains, and did not see the hot anger surge up into her face.

"You know the steps leading down from the castle; they are covered in, and are very dark when one comes out of the bright sunlight. Some fool had been eating an orange there, and had carelessly thrown

the peel on the steps. I did not notice it, and so trod on a bit. The next thing I knew I was in a heap at the foot of that long stairway, thinking every bone in my body was broken. I had many bruises, but no hurt that was serious; nevertheless I never had such a fright in my life, and I hope never to have such another." Bessie rose up with much dignity.

"I am obliged to you for your recital, Mr. Severance," she said freezingly. "If I do not seem to appreciate it as much as I should, it is perhaps because I am not accustomed to being laughed at."

"I assure you, Miss Durand, that I am not laughing at you, and that this pathetic incident was anything but a laughing matter to me. The Stockhorn has no such danger lying in wait for a man as a bit of orange peel on a dark and steep stairway. Please do not be offended with me. I told you my stories have no alpine glow about them, but the danger is undoubtedly there."

Archie had risen to his feet, but there was no forgiveness in Miss Durand's eyes as she bade him "Good afternoon" and went into the hotel, leaving him standing there.

During the week that followed, Archie had little chance of making his peace with Miss Durand, for in that week the Sanderson episode had its beginning, its rise, and its culmination. Charlie Sanderson, emboldened by the sudden departure of Wellman, became the constant attendant of Bessie, and everything appeared to be in his favor until the evening he left. That evening the two strolled along the walk that borders the north side of the river, leading to the lake. They said they were going to see the alpine glow on the snow mountains, but nobody believed that, for the glow can be seen quite as well from the terrace in front of the hotel. Be that as it may, they came back together shortly before eight o'clock, Bessie looking her prettiest, and Sanderson with a black frown on his face, evidently in the worst of tempers. He flung his belongings into a bag, and departed on the eight-forty train for Berne. As Archie met the pair, Bessie actually smiled very sweetly upon him, while Sanderson glared as if he had never met Severance before.

"That episode is evidently ended," said Archie to himself as he continued his walk toward Lake Thun. "I wonder if it is pure devilment that induces her to lead people on to a proposal and then drop them. I suppose Charlie will leave now, and we

shall have no more games of billiards. I wonder why they all seem to think it the proper thing to go away. I wouldn't. A woman is like a difficult peak: if you don't succeed the first time, you should try again. I believe I will try half a dozen proposals with Bessie myself. If I ever come to the point, she won't find it so easy to get rid of me as she does with all the rest."

Meditating thus, he sat down on a bench under the trees facing the lake. Archie wondered if the momentous question had been asked at this spot. It seemed just the place for it, and he noticed that the gravel on the path was much disturbed, as if by the iron-shod point of an agitated man's cane. Then he remembered that Sanderson was carrying an iron pointed cane. As Archie smiled and looked about him, he saw on the seat beside him a neat little morocco-bound book with a silver clasp. It had evidently slipped from the insecure dress pocket of a lady who had been sitting there. Archie picked it up, and turned it over and over in his hands. It is a painful thing to be compelled to make excuses for one of whom we would fain speak well, but it must be admitted that at this point in his life Severance did what he should not have done. He actually read the contents of the book, although he must have been aware before he turned the second leaf that what was there set down was meant for no eye save the writer's own. Archie excuses himself by maintaining that he had to read the book before he could be sure it belonged to anybody in particular, and that he opened it at first merely to see if there were a name or a card inside. But there is little doubt that the young man knew from the very first whose book it was, and he might at least have asked Miss Durand if it were hers before he opened it. However, there is little purpose in speculating on what might have been, and as the reading of the note-book led directly to the utterly unjustifiable action of Severance afterwards, as one wrong step invariably leads to another, the contents of the little volume are here given so that the reader of this tragedy may the more fully understand the situation.

II.

BESSIE'S CONFESSION.

AUGUST 1st.—The keeping of a diary is a silly fashion, and I am sure I would not

bother with one, if my memory were good and if I had not a great object in view. However, I do not intend this book to be more than a collection of notes that will be useful to me when I begin my novel. The novel is to be the work of my life, and I mean to use every talent I may have to make it unique and true to life. I think the New Woman novel is a thing of the past, and that the time has now come for a novel of the old sort, yet written with a fidelity to life such as has never been attempted by the old novelists. A painter or a sculptor uses a model while producing a great picture or a great statue. Why should not a writer use a model also? The motive of all great novels must be love, and the culminating point of a love story is the proposal.

In no novel that I have ever read is the proposal well done. Men evidently do not talk much to each other about the proposals they make; therefore a man writer has merely his own experience to go upon, so his proposals have a sameness; his hero proposes just as he himself has done or would do. Women writers seem to have more imagination in this matter, but they describe a proposal as they would like it to be, and not as it actually is. I find that it is quite an easy thing to get a man to

propose. I suppose I have a gift that way, and besides there is no denying the fact that I am handsome, and perhaps that is something of an aid. I therefore intend to write down in this book all my proposals, using the exact language the man employed, and thus I shall have the proposals in my novel precisely as they occurred. I shall also set down here any thoughts that may be of use to me as I write my book.

August 2d.—I shall hereafter not date the notes in this book; that will make it look less like a diary, which I detest. We are in Thun, which is a lovely place. Humboldt, whoever he is or was, said it is one of the three prettiest spots on earth. I wonder what the names are of the other two. We intended to stay but one night

at this hotel, but I see it is full of young men, and as all the women seem to be rather ugly and given to gossip, I think this is just the place for the carrying out of my ideas. The average young man is always ready to fall in love while on his vacation, it makes time pass so pleasantly; and as I read somewhere that a man as a general rule proposes fourteen times during his life, I may as well, in the interests of literature, be the recipient of some of those offers. I have hit on what I think is a marvellous idea. I shall arrange the offers with some regard to the scenery, just as I suppose a stage manager does. One shall propose by the river—there are lovely shady walks on both sides; another up in the mountains; another in the moon-

light on the lake, in one of the pretty foreign-looking row-boats they have here, with striped awnings. I don't believe any novelist has ever thought of such a thing. Then I can write down a vivid description of the scenery in conjunction with the language the young man uses. If my book is not a success it will be because there are no discriminating critics in England.

First proposal. This came on rather unexpectedly. His name is Samuel Caldwell, and he is a curate, here for his health.

He is not in the least in love with me, but he thinks he is, and so I suppose it comes to the same thing. He began by saying that I was the only one who ever understood his real aspirations, and that if I would join my lot with his he was sure we would not only bring happiness to ourselves, but to others as well. I told him gently that my own highest aspiration was to write a successful novel, and this horrified him, for he thinks novels are wicked. He has gone to Grindewald, where he thinks the air is more suitable for his lungs. I hardly count this as a proposal, and it took me so much by surprise that it was half over before I realized that it actually was an offer of his heart and hand. Besides it took place in the hotel garden, of all unlikely spots!



"HE SAW ON THE SEAT BESIDE HIM A NEAT LITTLE MOROCCO-BOUND BOOK."

Second proposal. Richard King is a very nice fellow, and was tremendously in earnest. He says his life is blighted, but he will soon come to a different opinion at Interlaken, where, Margaret Dunn writes me, it is very gay and where Richard has gone. Last evening we strolled down by the lake, and he suggested that we should go out in a boat. He engaged one with two women to row, one sitting at the stern and the other standing at the prow, working great oars that looked like cricket bats. The women did not understand English, and we floated on the lake until the moon came up over the snow mountains. Richard leaned over and tried to take my hand, whispering in a low voice "Bessie." I confess I was rather in a flutter and could think of nothing better to say than "Sir!" in a tone of surprise and indignation. He went on very hurriedly.

"Bessie," he said, "we have known each other only a few days, but in those few days I have lived in paradise."

"Yes," I answered, gathering my wits about me, "Humboldt says Thun is one of the three——"

Richard interrupted me with something that sounded remarkably like "Hang Thun!" Then he went on and said I was all the world to him; that he could not live without me. I shook my head slowly, and did not reply. He spoke with a fluency that seemed to suggest practice, but I told him it could never be. Then he folded his arms, sitting moodily back in the boat, saying I had blighted his life. He did look handsome as he sat there in the moonlight with a deep frown on his brow, but I could not help thinking he sat back purposely so that the moonlight might strike his face. I wish I could write down the exact language he used, for he was very eloquent, but somehow I cannot bring myself to do it, even in this book. I am sure, however, that when I come to write my novel and turn up these notes I shall recall the words. Still, I intended to put down the exact phrases. I wish I could take notes at the time, but when a man is proposing he seems to want all your attention.

A fine, stalwart young man came to the hotel to-day, bronzed by mountain climbing. He looks as if he would propose in a manner not so much like all the rest. I have found that his name is Archibald Severance, and they say he is a great mountaineer. What a splendid thing a proposal on the high Alps would be from such a man, with the gleaming snow all

around. I think I shall use that idea in the book.

Third, fourth, fifth, and sixth proposals. I must confess that I am amazed and disappointed with the men. Is there no such thing as originality among mankind? You would think they had all taken lessons from some proposing-master; they all have the same formula. The last four all began by calling me "Bessie" with the air of taking a great and important step in life. Mr. Wellman varied it a little by asking me to call him Jimmy, but the principle is just the same. I suppose this sameness is the result of our modern system of education. I am sure Archie would act differently. I am not certain that I like him, but he interests me more than any of the others. I was very angry with him a week ago. He knows it, but he doesn't seem to care. As soon as Charlie Sanderson proposes I will see what can be done with Archie Severance.

I like the name Archie. It seems to suit the young man exactly. I have been wondering what sort of scenery would accord best with Mr. Severance's proposal. I suppose a glacier would be about the correct thing, for I imagine Archie is rather cold and sneering when he is not in a very good humor. The lake would be too placid for his proposal, and when one is near the rapids one cannot hear what the man is saying. I think the Kohleren Gorge would be just the spot, it is so wild and romantic, with a hundred waterfalls dashing down the precipices. I must ask Archie if he has ever seen the Kohleren Falls. I suppose he will despise them because they are not up among the snow peaks.

III.

BESSIE'S PROPOSAL.

AFTER reading the book which he had no business to read, Archie closed the volume, fastened the clasp, and slipped it into his inside pocket. There was a meditative look in his eyes as he gazed over the blue lake.

"I can't return it to her—now," Archie said to himself. "Perhaps I should not have read it. So she is not a flirt after all, but merely uses us poor mortals as models." Archie sighed. "I think that's better than being a flirt—but I'm not quite sure. I suppose an author is justified in going to great lengths to insure the success of so important a thing as a book. It may

be that I can assist her with this tremendous work of fiction. I will think about it. But what am I to do about this little diary? I must think about that as well. I can't give it to her and say I did not read it, for I am such a poor hand at lying.

"Good heavens! I believe that is Bessie coming alone along the river bank. I'll wager she has missed the book and knows pretty accurately where she lost it. I'll place it where I found it and hide."

The line of trees along the path made it easy for Archie to carry out successfully his hastily formed resolution. He felt like a sneak, a feeling he thoroughly merited, as he dodged behind the trees and so worked his way to the main road. He saw Bessie march straight for the bench, pick up the book, and walk back towards the hotel, without ever glancing around, and her definite action convinced Archie that she had no suspicion that anyone had seen her book. This made the young man feel easier in his mind, and he swung along the Interlaken road towards Thun, flattering himself that no harm had been done. Nevertheless, he had resolved to revenge Miss Bessie's innocent victims, and as he walked, he turned plan after plan over in his mind. Vengeance would be all the more complete as the girl had no idea that her literary methods were known to anyone but herself.

For the next week Archie was very attentive to Bessie, and it must be recorded that the pretty young woman seemed to appreciate his devotion thoroughly and to like it. One morning, beautifully arrayed in walking costume, Bessie stood on the terrace, apparently scanning the sky as if anxious about the weather, but in reality looking out for an escort, the gossips said to each other as they sat under the awnings busy at needle-work and slander, for of course no such thought was in the young lady's mind. She smiled sweetly when Archie happened to come out of the billiard-room, but then she always greeted her friends in a kindly manner.

"Are you off for a walk this morning?" asked Archie, in the innocent tone of one who didn't know and really desired the information.

"Yes," said Bessie with a saucy air of defiance as if she did not care who knew it. "I am going by the upper road to the Kohleren Falls. Have you ever seen them?"

"No. Are they pretty?"

"Pretty! They are grand, at least the gorge is, although perhaps you would not

think either the gorge or the falls worth visiting."

"How can I tell until I have visited them? Won't you be my guide there?"

"I shall be most happy to have you come, only you must promise to speak respectfully of both ravine and fall."

"I was not the man who spoke disrespectfully of the Equator, you know," said Archie as they walked off together.

It took the two rather more than an hour, by the upper road overlooking the town of Thun and the lake beyond, to reach the finger-board that pointed down into the Kohleren valley. They zigzagged along a rapidly falling path until they reached the first of a series of falls roaring into the deep gorge surrounded by a dense forest. Bessie leaned against the frail hand-rail and gazed into the depths, Severance standing by her side.

Severance was the first to speak, and when he spoke it was not on the subject of the cataract.

"Miss Durand," he said, "I love you. I ask you to be my wife."

"Oh, Mr. Severance," replied Bessie without lifting her eyes from the foaming chasm, "I hope that nothing in my actions has led you to—"

"Am I to understand that you are about to refuse me?" cried Archie in a menacing voice that sounded above the roar of the falling waters. Bessie looked quickly up at him, and seeing a dark frown on his brow, drew slightly away from him.

"Certainly I am going to refuse you. I have known you only a few weeks."

"That has nothing to do with it. I tell you, girl, that I love you. Don't you understand what I say?"

"I understand what you say well enough, but I don't love you. Is not that answer sufficient?"

"It would be sufficient if it were true. It is not true. You do love me. I have seen that for days, for although you may have striven to conceal your affection for me, yet it has been evident to everyone, and more especially to the man who loved you. Why, then, deny what has been patent to all onlookers? Have I not seen your face brighten when I approached you? Have I not seen a welcoming smile on your lips that could have had but one meaning?"

"Mr. Severance," cried Bessie in unfeigned alarm, "have you gone suddenly mad? How dare you speak to me in this fashion?"

"Girl," shouted Archie, grasping her by

the wrist, "is it possible that I am wrong in supposing you care for me, and that the only other inference to be drawn from your actions is the true one?"

"What other inference?" asked Bessie in a trembling voice, trying unsuccessfully to withdraw her wrist from his iron grasp.

"That you have been trifling with me," hissed Severance. "That you have led me on and on, meaning nothing. That you have been pretending to care for me when in reality you merely wanted to add one more to the many proposals you have received. That is the alternative. Now which is the fact? Are you in love with me or have you been fooling me?"

"I told you I was not in love with you, but I did think you were a gentleman. Now that I see you are a ruffian, I hate you. Let go my wrist; you are hurting me."

"Very good; very good. Now we have the truth at last, and I will teach you the danger of making a plaything of a human heart."

Severance let go her wrist and seized her around the waist. Bessie screamed and called for help, while the man who held her a helpless prisoner laughed sardonically. With his free hand he thrust aside the frail pine pole that formed a hand-rail to guard the edge of the cliff. It fell into the torrent and disappeared down the cataract.

"What are you going to do?" cried the girl, her eyes wide with terror.

"I intend to leap with you into this abyss; then we shall be united forever."

"O Archie, Archie, I love you," sobbed Bessie, throwing her arms around the neck of the astonished young man, who was so amazed at the sudden turn events had taken that in stepping back he nearly accomplished the disaster he had a moment before threatened.

"Then, why—why," he stammered, "did you—why did you deny it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose because I am contrary, or because, as you said, it was so self-evident. Still I don't believe I would ever have accepted you if you hadn't forced me to. I have become so wearied with the conventional form of proposal."

"Yes, I suppose it does get rather tiresome," said Archie, mopping his brow. "I see a bench a little farther down; sup-

pose we sit there and talk the matter over."

He gave her his hand, and she tripped daintily down to the bench, where they sat down together.

"You didn't really believe I was such a ruffian as I pretended to be," said Archie at last.

"Why, yes. Aren't you?" she asked simply, glancing sideways at him with her most winning smile.

"You surely didn't actually think I was going to throw you over the cliff."

"Oh, I have often heard or read of it being done. Were you only pretending?"

"That's all. It was really a little matter of revenge. I thought you ought to be punished for the way you had used those other fellows. And Sanderson was such a good hand at billiards. I could just beat him."

"You—you said—you cared for me. Was that pretence too?" asked Bessie with a catch in her voice.

"No. That was all true, Bessie, and there is where my scheme of vengeance goes lame. You see, my dear girl, I never thought you would look at me; some of the other fellows are ever so much better than I am, and of course I did not imagine I had any chance. I hope you will forgive me and that you won't insist on having a real revenge by withdrawing what you have said."

"I shall have revenge enough on you, Archie, you poor deluded young man, all your life. But never say anything more about 'the other fellows,' as you call them. There never was any other fellow but you. Perhaps I will show you a little book some day that will explain everything, although I am not so sure, if you saw it, you might not think worse of me than ever. I think perhaps it is my duty to show it to you before it is too late to draw back. Shall I?"

"I absolutely refuse to look at it; now or any other time," said Archie magnanimously, drawing her towards him and kissing her.

And Bessie, with a sigh of relief, wondered why it was that men have so much less curiosity than women. She was sure that if he had hinted at any such secret, she would never have rested until she knew what it was.

